

six individuals in a number of locations along the swamp's northwestern edge, particularly where these formed intrusions into the surrounding *Brachystegia* woodland. D. McCallum (pers. comm.), a hunter who knew the area well and who had photographed these cranes in the Moyowosi, confirmed that they had been seen whenever he had visited the area in previous years. There is therefore a suggestion that the species occupies this area permanently.

Shoebills *Balaeniceps rex* were seen frequently over a large area running down the southeastern side of the Moyowosi swamps. Normally this species is somewhat cryptic from the ground, standing still amongst aquatic sedges and reeds. However, the low passage of the aircraft in the immediate vicinity of a Shoebill caused alarm - the bird either crouching with outspread wings or taking flight. Using these reactions I counted all Shoebills within 50 m of my flight paths and was able to produce a crude estimate of densities. This was 0.64 Shoebills/km<sup>2</sup> of suitable habitat. The extent of suitable habitat was estimated to be of the order of 200 km<sup>2</sup> and thus the area might have held a population of more than 300 of these birds. While the crudeness of the estimate calls for caution in any use made of it, it does suggest that Brown *et al.* (1982) were unduly pessimistic in their suggestion that the continental population might be as low as 1500. Being familiar with the species on Lake Bangweulu, Zambia, Lake Kioga, Uganda, and along the Albert Nile, also in Uganda, it was not my impression that the Shoebills on the Moyowosi were particularly numerous. An impression of scarcity probably derives from the general inaccessibility of the species' habitat. In the few areas where it can be searched from a boat or from a vehicle, the habitat is usually a thin ribbon along the water's edge. In such circumstances the bird's scarcity is not surprising. Where the habitat is extensive, in the shallows between dry land and papyrus banks, it is difficult to search from either boats or wheeled vehicles.

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THE SWALLOW-TAILED KITE *CHELICHTINIA RIOCOURII* BREEDING  
IN THE KEDONG VALLEY, KENYA

In a recent note, Sutton *et al.* (1984) gave brief details of the first confirmed breeding record of the Swallow-tailed Kite *Chelictinia riocourii* in the Kedong valley, some 60 km northwest of Nairobi (1°03'S, 36°25'E), Kenya.

Following a subsequent visit to the nest site on 23 October 1983, further information can be given. As previously noted (Sutton *et al.* 1984), the nest was built in a *Balanites* tree about 3 m above ground level and about 1 m beneath the nest of a Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*. Three young Swallow-tailed Kites were seen: two were well able to fly while the third was obviously less advanced.

Based on estimates of the incubation and fledging periods (Brown *et al.* 1982), the eggs must have been laid during the second half of August, when the Secretary Bird was still occupying the nest above. This association with other raptors while nesting is known in this species (Brown *et al.* 1982). The recorded breeding range of the Swallow-tailed Kite is in the northern tropics during the April/May rains (Brown & Britton 1980); these Kedong birds were thus breeding some two to three months later at 1°S, the southern limit of their known breeding range.

As previously noted (Sutton *et al.* 1984), the nest was very white, contrasting with the green of the *Balanites* tree. The young birds' rather mucilag-

inous droppings fell vertically, thus whitening the nest material, a habit more typical of the Falconidae rather than of the Accipitridae (Brown & Amadon 1968), which generally eject their excreta clear of the nest.

Both adults brought food to the young and during the mid morning period one chick was fed seven times during 105 min, another five times in 60 min and the third seven times in 80 min. All prey items seen delivered to the young were lizards, however, it was not possible from the distance to determine to what family they belonged. Each young bird was thus fed once every 11 to 15 min. The adults hunted within about 2 km of the nest tree, and prey was caught either by a dive from harrier (*Circus*)-like quartering, or by plunging to earth from a hover. Not every attempt was successful.

Two days later (25 October) the adults were seen passing food directly to the young in mid air, while doing so both young and adult tumbled earthwards (R. Campbell and B. Davidson, pers. comm.).

Although the chicks called from time to time in the absence of the adult birds, they became very vocal when the adults were seen, uttering high-pitched 'chirruping' calls and exposing their red gapes. On two occasions, one of the adults uttered a melodious 'chattering' call as it left the nest, but otherwise they were silent.

Some pellets were found beneath the nest, but many of them had been broken up by beetles (Coleoptera: Trogidae) which were feeding on their organic content. Identified remains from the pellets included Orthoptera, Hymenoptera (Formicidae), some Coleoptera, two separate chelicerae of a solifuge (Arachnida: Solifugae) as well as lizard jaw bones and vertebrae. Two of the pellets, which were rough in texture, measured 22 x 13 mm and 23 x 15 mm.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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- C.F. Dewhurst and L.D.C. Fishpool, Box 30023, Nairobi Received 4 January 1984
- Scopus* 8: 25-26, March 1984

#### A ROOST OF LESSER KESTRELS *FALCO NAUMANNI* ON THE ATHI PLAINS, KENYA

Smalley (1983) describes a roost of Lesser Kestrels observed in Nairobi National Park during March and April 1983, and states that large assemblies of this species have not been recorded in the area for many years. This roost was not an isolated occurrence, however, as on 9 and 10 April 1983 C.A. Taylor and I observed a large roost of Lesser Kestrels in tall acacia trees in a valley on the Athi Plains near Kajiado at 1.46S, 36.46E. The roost contained at least 2500 Lesser Kestrels and 35 Eastern Red-footed Falcons *Falco amurensis*.

Birds were seen to approach the roost from all directions but the majority came from the west and southwest; they continued to arrive at the roost until darkness fell. The only other Palaearctic falcon seen in the vicinity of the roost was a single Hobby *F. subbuteo* on 9 April.

#### REFERENCE

- SMALLEY, M.E. 1983. A major Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* roost in Kenya. *Scopus* 7: 44-47.

P.B. Taylor, Box 25138, Nairobi

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